

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

SHOEBILL *BALAEINICEPS REX*: A DELETION FROM
THE KENYA AVIFAUNA

The Kenya shoreline of Lake Victoria contains ostensibly suitable habitat for Shoebills. In view of this, and the fact that between 1965 and 1971 I flew over this area repeatedly, going to and from Uganda, I was constantly asked earnestly by the ornithologist at Kenya's National Museum, Alec Forbes-Watson, to keep an eye open for the species. It so occurred that during aerial survey work along the Albert Nile in Uganda, I and a colleague photographed a Shoebill. After returning to Nairobi we were asked by Forbes-Watson if we had examined the grounds about the Yala Swamp. "Yes" said I, and handed over the photograph as Kenya's first authentic record of the species. The leg-pull was to have been revealed later in the day but, what with a more than usually convivial lunch intervening, it was not. And so 'Yala Swamp' slipped formally into the Kenya record as the only locality for this species. I now formally remove it. *Mea culpa!*

I.S.C. Parker, Box 30678, Nairobi

Received 1 December 1983

Scopus 8: 79, September 1984

RESPONSE OF A BLACKSMITH PLOVER *VANELLUS ARMATUS* TO ANTS
ATTACKING A HATCHING EGG

Although ants are well known to be significant predators of nestlings in the tropics (Skutch 1976), little appears to have been recorded about anti-ant strategies used by parent birds. Small passerines, like the White-browed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys sclateri* whose small nestlings I saw completely devoured by 'safari' ants *Dorylus* sp. in 15 minutes, can do nothing to protect their young, but parental behaviour can free a nest from ants as in the instance described below.

In July 1962 I had a hide at a Blacksmith Plover's nest on the Wembere in Tanzania. When I entered the hide on 12 July three eggs were pipped and the fourth was holed. About an hour later the sitting bird started showing agitation when a column of 'safari' ants began invading the nest. When the plover left the eggs I could see that ants were entering the holed egg to attack the chick inside. The parent ran round calling and making ineffectual pecks at the ants in the nest and then, suddenly, picked up the holed egg in its bill, carried it away and dropped it into shallow water some 10 m away.

With no other chicks vulnerable to attack the ants quickly vacated the nest, allowing the plover to resume incubation. The remaining three eggs hatched during the next 12 hours.

When I was let out of the hide a couple of hours later, I retrieved the dumped egg and found, as expected, that the chick was dead - whether drowned or killed by the ants I cannot say.

REFERENCE

SKUTCH, A.F. 1976. *Parent birds and their young*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.

J.F. Reynolds, 35 Foxcroft Drive, Brighouse, West Yorkshire HD6 3PQ, England

Received 30 June 1984

Scopus 8: 79, September 1984